

**Statement of Chairman Charles E. Schumer
Committee on Rules and Administration**

**Hearing on
Voter Registration: Assessing Current Problems
March 11, 2009**

The Rules Committee shall come to order. Good Morning.

Once again, I'd like to thank the Ranking Member and say how much I look forward to working with him. Our topic today is voter registration – if voting is the heart of democracy, registering Americans is the lifeblood of our Republic. But, it seems as if we've had some serious circulation problems. What the butterfly ballots and hanging chads were in 2000, is what voter registration problems are today.

Today we will hear new, groundbreaking reports of astounding problems with our voter registration system. Hidden from the excitement of this past election was the fact that millions of voters, through no fault of their own, were shut out of this process due to deeply rooted problems that need to be fixed. We'll hear from our witnesses in more detail, but the numbers are staggering.

Professor Ansolabehere's extensive research reveals that as many as 7 million eligible and registered voters were denied the right to vote, whether it was a photo ID requirement, list purges, no match/no vote comparisons, or simply because they moved from one home to another and their voter registration didn't follow. His astonishing report also estimates that as many as 9 million people were prevented from registering to vote due to deadlines and change of residency requirements.

Each one alone may not seem like an egregious violation, but put together, you get massive disenfranchisement. This is unacceptable and undemocratic. And 7 million is enough to swing a federal election. Since World War II, the popular vote in 8 out of 16 presidential elections could have swung the other way, and hundreds of times over, states could have swung as well.

Voter registration errors know no party or ideology, and the stories are heartbreaking:

- There are the serviceman and his wife who move from base to base, and yet aren't allowed to vote because they arrived at their new residence too late to meet the deadline to register. They can't even vote for their commander in chief, who will determine whether or not the soldier is sent off to war.
- There is the hard-working father holding down two jobs to put food on the table for his kids, who skips dinnertime to go and vote, only to be turned away, simply because his name was confused with that of an ineligible convicted felon.
- There is the tradesman who finds out his name isn't on the rolls because his handwriting wasn't clear on his voter registration form, so an "A" becomes a "U", and there's no match to the driver's license.
- In fact, "Joe the Plumber" was nearly denied the right to vote last November because his name was misspelled on the voter rolls.
- There is the student who attends a University in Virginia, only to be told that he cannot register to vote at his new domicile, and if he does, he could lose financial aid.
- And there is the woman who shows up to vote only to find out she wasn't even registered, due to an error made by a third party registration organization who misplaced the form, or sent it in too late.

I cannot tell you how many times I heard the refrain: "I registered to vote, and when I showed up, I was told my name wasn't on the rolls." So, we still seem to be stuck in the mud on certain issues. In the 21st century, people shouldn't be denied their Constitutional right to vote because of problems caused by an antiquated voter registration system that was set up in the 19th century by the Whig party – and the Whigs aren't even around anymore!

It is truly remarkable that with the technology we have today, that someone could be turned away at the polls simply because he or she has moved to a different county, or has bad handwriting. This is not to blame our local election officials who work hard to make sure the trains run on time on Election Day. In

fact, just yesterday, Secretaries of State Carnahan (a Democrat from Missouri) and Grayson (a Republican from Kentucky), very clearly described the problems state election officials face with voter registration, and I ask unanimous consent that their column in Roll Call be entered into the record.

The crush of last-minute registration and the massive amount of data entries involved are a lot to place on local county officials with limited resources. Additionally, the amount of money spent on maintaining current voter registration lists places a strain on state governments already struggling with the current economic crisis. Part of the problem may be that states and counties need more resources to ensure that all eligible voters can get registered, and all those registered – can vote.

So today, we examine the problems. I cannot imagine what it was like for those millions of voters – some of whom were attempting to vote for the first time last year – who were told they were not registered correctly and could not cast a ballot. I cannot imagine what it was like for these folks to be denied the right to vote in this historic election. That shouldn't happen – not in the United States of America.

I look forward to hearing from all of you, and before I introduce our witnesses, I'll turn to my good friend and colleague, Ranking Member Bennett.